

OFFICE OF JURY COMMISSIONER
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Over 5,000 citizens appear in the Commonwealth's courthouses every week to perform jury duty. In the great majority of those courts, the jurors are welcomed each morning by a judge and thanked for their service. It is difficult to overstate the importance of such a judicial welcome, particularly for jurors who may not get to participate in an impanelment process on the day that they serve.

Each judge puts his or her special imprint on the judicial welcome. In recognition of Juror Appreciation Week and Law Day 2005, the theme of which was "The American Jury: We the People in Action," the Jury Management Advisory Committee prepared the following sample judicial welcome for use in greeting the jurors. It is posted here for informational purposes and for the convenience of any judges or others who care to make use of it, in whole or in part.

Jury Management Advisory Committee -- Sample Judicial Welcome of Jurors

Law Day/Juror Appreciation Week: May 1-6, 2005

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for reporting for jury duty today.

Citizens like you who serve as jurors form the cornerstone of our democracy. The constitutional right to a trial by a jury of one's peers stands as a safeguard of our liberties. Serving on a jury is one of the greatest responsibilities and exercises of authority entrusted to a citizen in our country.

When the Pilgrims came to our shores, they brought with them the concept of trial by jury. From colonial times to today, jury trials have been held in the Bay State. Thomas Jefferson said, "I consider trial by jury as the only anchor ever yet imagined by man, by which a government can be held to the principles of its constitution."

Outside of military service, jury duty is considered one of the greatest civic duties a citizen may perform to protect our constitutional freedoms. Ordinary people are

entrusted with extraordinary power: to listen to the facts in a case and arrive at a verdict. Citizens like you are selected randomly to report to a jury pool, and may later join together on a jury to perform this important responsibility.

Sharing power in our judicial system prevents governmental abuse and tyranny. As one of our former SJC chief justices said, “Jurors bring fresh minds.” People from all walks of life serve as jurors. Anyone who is eligible may serve as a juror. All jurors need are the ability to listen and common sense.

Our jury system is called One-Day/One-Trial, meaning that jurors show up for one day, and, if not impaneled, are released from service for at least three years. If you are impaneled, you serve for the duration of the trial. Most people finish in one day, and the overwhelming majority are done in three days.

The Office of Jury Commissioner strives to furnish juries that represent a fair cross-section of the community. If you are charged with a crime or are party in a civil case, you expect the jury to be impartial and to be fair. All who appear before the court should expect nothing less.

You are not alone. Each day, over 1,000 of your fellow citizens appear for jury duty at one of nearly 60 different courthouses across the Commonwealth. Each year, more than 770,000 are summoned for jury duty. Since we no longer allow any exemptions from jury duty, our jurors come from all walks of life, and even include judges.

Today you are sitting in a [District/Superior] Court where we hear all sorts of cases. [Give examples of the cases jurors may find themselves as members of a trial jury.]

We will try to get to you as quickly as possible. Our court officers will try to keep you updated throughout the day, but we hope you can understand that sometimes there is nothing that they can share with you. Even though you are secluded here in the jury pool, we are taking care of the business in the courtroom – business we might not be able to do if you were not here today, ready to assist in dispensing justice.

Even if you are not placed on a jury, you have not wasted your time. The mere presence of jurors in the courthouse, ready to be impaneled, leads many cases to settle without going to trial. In my experience on the bench it happens all the time. A defendant may accept a plea bargain in a criminal case, or a litigant in a civil case may agree to a settlement, because the parties know that good jurors are waiting in the jury pool ready to be seated on their jury and decide their cases.

Again, thank you for coming, and we appreciate all that you bring to jury duty. You truly make a difference in our court system.